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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000672

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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN FM SAYS NATO MUST LEAVE AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Neumann for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Drawing on Cold War rhetoric, Russian FM Lavrov told FM Spanta on February 23 that NATO must leave Afghanistan as it was an enduring presence against Russia (according to Spanta's debrief). The GOR is also worried about Iran's nuclear program and does not trust its regional intentions. Lavrov was non-committal toward a request for wide-ranging assistance. Separately, Spanta expressed anguish over Karzai's instructions not to speak out publicly against the draft amnesty bill. END SUMMARY.

Russian FM Wants NATO Out of Afghanistan

12. (C) On February 24, Foreign Minister Spanta briefed the Ambassador on Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov's February 23 visit to Kabul, noting that Lavrov's tone was markedly different from their last meeting when Spanta was in Moscow approximately a month ago. In Moscow, Lavrov was friendly and supportive of the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. This time Lavrov used "cold war tones," and tersely commented that NATO's presence in Afghanistan was "an enduring presence against Russia" that "denied Russia its proper role in Central Asia." Lavrov reportedly insisted that NATO "must leave" Afghanistan and said that NATO "denied Russian business interests" in Afghanistan. Spanta said that he told Lavrov that NATO's relationship with Afghanistan is "key" because Afghanistan cannot be secure without NATO. Spanta added that NATO was not against Russian interests.

FM Asks for Russian Assistance

13. (C) Spanta informed the Ambassador that he had asked Lavrov for assistance in providing larger stipends for Afghan students wishing to study in Russia; help with rebuilding the Foreign Ministry's archives; settling Afghanistan's debt with

Russia; and support in combating Afghanistan's enemies. Lavrov did not make any definitive commitments in response to Spanta's requests.

GOR Concerned About Iran

¶4. (C) Spanta said that Lavrov expressed concern about Iran's intentions, specifically its nuclear program, as well as in general. Lavrov characterized the GOI as "not honorable," and told Spanta that Iran was "not proceeding openly" with its agenda and was intentionally "hiding its purpose." He added that this bothered the GOR a great deal.

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Nothing to Indicate Russian Support for Taliban

¶5. (C) Changing topics, Spanta asked the Ambassador about reports that the Russian government was providing weapons to the Taliban. Spanta explained that the late Turkmenistan President Niyazov told Spanta after a trip to Pakistan that he had information indicating this. Spanta was unsure whether the information was credible, or whether it was perhaps misinformation disseminated to him by the GOP. The Ambassador replied that he had never seen any report indicating any GOR support for the Taliban.

FM Anguished Over Draft Amnesty Bill

¶6. (C) Following the conversation on Russia Spanta expressed angst over how to handle the draft amnesty bill that has made its way through Parliament and is on its way to the President. (Note: Spanta requested a private meeting

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with the Ambassador, and it was clear that something was weighing heavily on his mind. End Note.). Spanta said that Karzai had instructed him not to make any public statements about the draft legislation, which went strongly against Spanta's desire to speak out publicly in strong opposition to the bill. The Ambassador counseled Spanta to remain patient with the process and said he had faith the President would do the right thing and not sign the bill into law. Subsequently, President Karzai confirmed that he would not sign the bill. When the Ambassador saw Spanta on February 27 the latter said he had held more talks with Karzai, and Spanta seemed more relaxed about his position and relations with Karzai.
NEUMANN